

**Workshops on Communication
By Interactive Measurement Group at
The University of Nevada, Las Vegas**

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Lesson 1: Basic Communication

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce you to the basics of communication.

Caveat

This lesson is culturally specific to people that identify themselves as American or have adapted to American culture. Other cultures have their own ways of communicating verbally and non-verbally. Make good relationships your top priority. If someone is reacting badly to something you are saying or doing, adjust your behavior.

Prerequisites

No prerequisites are required to start this lesson

Part 1: Basic Overview

Whether it's talking to a friend, communicating with a loved one, or walking down the street, we are communicating with those around us in one way or another.

"Communication is the process of conveying feelings, attitudes, facts, beliefs, and ideas between individuals, either verbally or non-verbally in such a way that the message intended is received," (Walker, 2007). Communication isn't limited to just our voice, we also use our ears, our bodies, our biases, our intentions, our wants, and our needs; we use our whole being and the lens we use to see things in order to communicate with the people we encounter.

Communication is difficult because effective communication is a process which depends on the sender accurately communicating their thoughts into words and on the receiver accurately interpreting the transmitted message. Therefore, the sender must be able to accurately communicate what they mean to say and the receiver must be able to listen accurately to such message. Listening is a process, and like any process, failures or "breakdowns" can occur at any step, these failures are sometimes due to "communication barriers." Communication barriers can hinder, or prevent communication. Some examples of potential barriers are: stereotyping, hidden agendas, word meanings and usage, closed mind, and talking too fast (Walker, 2007).

There are 3 parts to the communication process: A sender of the message, a receiver of the message, and the content of the message (Walker, 2007). The sender of the message is the person who is sending out the message. This person has to take a thought and turn it into a coherent set of words, which they in turn must convey both verbally and non-verbally. The receiver of the message has to take this message, decode it, and understand it in the way the speaker intended. Finally the content of the message is the idea, thought, feeling, or whatever else the sender wanted to convey.

Both the sender and receiver can shadow the actual meaning of the sentence with their own biases. For example I have a couple Dick and Jane. They've been working together in the same office for 8 years, similar positions and status, with plenty of time to get on each other's nerves.

Consider the following conversation:

Dick: Jane can you have the reports done by Monday?

Jane: No, you just gave them to me, why can't you do your job?

Dick: Common Jane, I have to turn them into the boss Monday at noon or she'll have both our a**es!

Jane: Fine Dick, just remember not to screw it up again next month or else I'll make you pay...

Now consider how it could have gone:

Dick: Jane, can you have the reports done by Monday?

Jane: Dick, I got the reports two weeks late, I'm going to have to skip date night with my husband to have them done by Monday.

Dick: Please Jane, I know your date night is very important to you, and I'm sorry that I got them to you late. But you know that we are both on thin ice with the boss and she expects them by noon Monday or we're both in a lot of trouble.

Jane: I can skip my date night just this once if you promise not to be late getting them to me again, do we have an understanding?

Dick: Yes we do, thank you Jane!

In the following parts of this lesson you are going to learn both verbal and non-verbal ways of communication so you can become a better communicator and to help you avoid situations like the first conversation between Dick and Jane.

Part 2: Non-Verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication is easily over-looked. However it is the most important part of communication: 65% of our communication is by non-verbal means (Walker 2007). Non-verbal communication can reinforce, replace, or contradict our verbal messages. Non-verbal communication consists of facial expressions, eye contact, vocal qualities, and all other bodily movements.

The face can tell someone a lot about our feelings. We are very adept at figuring out different emotions by simply looking at someone's face. You can easily tell the difference between someone who is happy and someone who is sad simply by looking

at their face. As Marcus Cicero stated, “The face is a picture of the mind as the eyes are its interpreter.”

Specifically the eyes can tell us a lot. For example, eyes that are set and do not blink can express challenge or displeasure, where eyes that are soft and blink at the normal rate of 6 to 10 times a minute can suggest interest and affection (Cormier & Nurius 2003). When someone is listening to you, if they are looking you in the eyes they are generally interested and involved in what you have to say; however if someone is looking away from you they may not be paying attention, may be thinking about what they are going to say when you are done, or could be forming their own opinions about what you are saying.

The eyes are not the only thing that gives us away. Other parts of the body can express our inner most feelings. The arms and position of the hands can be a very good indicator of how the person you're talking to is feeling. Generally speaking, if someone has their arms cross, they are trying to close themselves off from the influence of the person or people they are talking to. Just keep in mind that some people also cross their arms out of habit, to hide a spot on their shirt, or even to try to camouflage excess weight. If someone has their arms in their pockets or relaxed at their sides or in their lap, they are generally open to what you have to say and are comfortable with the conversation. Fidgeting can be a sign of anxiety. If they repeatedly play with an object, piece of clothing, or constantly touch a body part (e.g., the end of their nose), it is a sign that they are feeling uncomfortable. Although some say fingering the end of your nose is a sign of lying, these types of movements could simply be a sign of general anxiety about the topic of discussion, feeling guilty even though it has nothing to do with them, or even worried about something else entirely.

It is very important to spend time observing people, communicating with them, and trying to understand them before you jump to any conclusions that you may derive simply from body language. This being said, there is a lot of good rules to follow when you are trying to make a good impression when communicating with others. One of the most important times for a college student to be aware of and in control of their body language would be when interviewing for graduate school or their first job.

Sitting in an interview is the most important time to have control over your non-verbal body language. Not only do you want to be seen as competent, you also want to come across as confident and likeable. Here are some tips to follow when interviewing:

- Make sure that your body is reflecting what you are saying. You don't want to be grinning ear to ear while trying to explain why you got a D+ in chemistry. Rehearsing the answers to common interview questions on camera or in front of a mirror can be excellent practice.

- Take up space. You are important and belong here, use the room you are given. Don't cross your arms and legs when talking to others. Use the arm rests, lean in, put your arms on the table or desk, just take up the appropriate amount of room for your size. This conveys interest in the person you are talking to and confidence in yourself.
- Use appropriate gestures when you talk. Don't wring your hands in your lap because you are nervous. Take up more space and "break the silhouette" when you use your hands (Frankel 2004). This means that you shouldn't gesture right in front of your body, turn to the side, put your arms out to the side, take up more room. Just keep in mind that your gesture size should be appropriate for the number of people you are talking to. Talking to 1,000 people is much different than talking to one.
- Be excited. When you are passionate and excited about the topic, it is definitely going to shine through in your body language. If you're too nervous to be excited, practice practice practice. Use friends, family, mirrors, coworkers, whoever you need to. Do it so much and so often that it becomes so natural that the only thing other people see is your passion.
- Do not tilt your head. This can be seen as a sign of confusion, doubt, or even flirting. Practice keeping your head upright in a natural relaxed position. This may be particularly hard for ladies to master, but once you do, it's worth it.
- Wear appropriate makeup. Okay guys, this one is mostly for the ladies. Your make-up shouldn't be bold or overdone. It also shouldn't be underdone. As with everything else practice makes perfect, ask a trusted friend for advice or you can go to any high end department store and ask for a free consultation.
- Your hair is also important. You want it to be well maintained and appropriate for the occasion. Often it is said ladies with long hair should wear it in a bun or other tight, up-style, however I feel there are many ways to keep it out of your face and tasteful. Experiment with it and see what looks the best on you.
- Try to match the vibe of the location. Different places take on personalities all their own. Take the time to scope out the location ahead of time. See what other people are wearing, watch how they move, and notice how they interact. Practice matching, or mirroring, how they are. This will give your interviewer the sense that you are already a part of the group, and could give you a leg up on the competition.
- If you need to groom yourself, do it in a private place such as a restroom or other closed off area. You never know who is who and often everyone is watching. You

don't know who's going to tell an embarrassing story to the boss potentially costing you a lot of embarrassment and the position.

- In group meetings or interviews try to sit next to the most powerful person. This can guarantee that they notice you, which is very important. Participate in the discussion, and lean in towards the group. If you are sitting at a table, rest your forearms on the table with your hands lightly clasped. Not only to take up space, but it also makes you look involved and interested.
- If you are standing up, don't shift your weight from side to side or fidget. This is often construed as impatience or boredom. Crossing one foot in front of the other is often a sign of insecurity. Both things you want to avoid during interviews.

Just remember practice makes perfect. Watch the people you admire, watch the people around you, watch people play characters in movies. All of these things can help you understand the importance and intricacies of non-verbal communication. Learning to read non-verbal cues can help you understand and communicate better with those around you. Also, learning to control your body when you communicate can help you become more likeable, better understood, and make you more successful. There is a lot of information out there on non-verbal communication, just remember that it is a guide and culturally specific. The best thing to do is practice and to figure out what works best for you.

Group Activity 1

This activity will take about 10 minutes.

To practice conveying emotions non-verbally, students will play charades. Students will work in pairs. The first student will pick an emotion from the following list, and will try to convey that emotion non-verbally. They can use posture, gestures, and tone of voice. However, the only sentence they are allowed to say is “The cat jumped over the moon.” The first student IS allowed to act (just like in regular charades). The second student will guess which emotion it is. They ARE allowed to look at the list. They are allowed three guesses, and then the first student will tell them which emotion they were trying to convey. Next, the two students will switch roles. They will continue this game until they have tried 10 of the following emotions (5 each).

Depressed	abashed	curious	pensive
jubilant	annoyed	mournful	satisfied
disappointed	surprised	frustrated	proud
excited	scared	concerned	tempted
jealous	hopeful	amused	wear

Part 3: Verbal Communication

Words and language are our primary means of communication. Words enable us to share thoughts and feelings with others more effectively than non- verbal communication does. Without words and language our lives would be an endless game of charades. The most important thing to remember about words is that they cannot be unsaid.

Semantics is the study of meaning and changes of meanings of words. Semantics can be a communication barrier if the person you are attempting to communicate with does not understand the jargon you use. Therefore it is important to remember who you are communicating with, so that you can decide if jargon is appropriate. If you use jargon while communicating with someone who may not know your jargon you are assuming that they will understand.

To assume means to accept a fact without any evidence of proof. Most people know that assumptions are bad, and you should always avoid making them, yet many people still make them. When we communicate with others we cannot assume they know what we actually mean because this will lead to a misunderstanding. On the other hand, you must not be condescending. Assuming someone doesn't know something can be just as dangerous as assuming they do know something. While your communication with them goes on, you must adapt to their level of knowledge. If they display a certain level of

knowledge in one area, it could mean that they do know enough for you to assume they know other things. It is a delicate balance that you will be able to navigate confidently with practice.

When communicating with others the single most important factor is our self-concept. If we are insecure then we may respond to innocent remarks with defensiveness and justifications. People who are insecure may see innocent questions as accusations and respond defensively (Walker 2007).

Lesson 2: Basic Listening

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to teach you the basics of being a good listener.

Prerequisites

Successful completion of Lesson 1: Basic Communication

Part 1: Barriers to Listening

Barriers can be any ideas, habits, or attitudes that keep you from listening attentively or accurately interpreting what you are hearing (Walker 2007). Some examples of communication barriers include an internal psychological filter or a hidden agenda.

An internal psychological filter is the filter through which everything we hear passes through before we interpret it. This filter consists of our experiences, prejudices, and attitudes that make us who we are. It is the lens through which we see the world. It has a important impact on how we perceive and interpret everything we hear.

Consider the following conversation:

Husband: Have you fed the dogs yet?

Wife: No, I have been making dinner. Do you expect me to do everything around here while you just sit around?

It is possible that the husband was asking if the dogs had been fed so that he could feed them himself if it still needed to be done, but because of the wife's internal psychological filter, she interprets the question as an accusation and responds defensively.

As you get older your psychological filter gets bigger and you have to remember to keep an open mind and not let you psychological filter block out new and important ideas.

A hidden agenda can be a barrier to listening by consciously or unconsciously making us focus on our own wants and needs to manipulate the conversation. The phrase "chip on your shoulder" can refer to this hidden agenda that changes what and how we perceive what we are hearing.

Occasionally, when we are listening to people speak, we will stop listening, either because we are not interested in what they have to say or because we are preoccupied with what we are thinking about. We need to remember that the rate of speech is 100-150 words per minute and the rate of thought is 400-600, this means that it is easy to let our minds wander while we wait for the speaker to finish their thought. Also, we may be so preoccupied with what we want to say that we start the conversation only to find an opening for ourselves to talk. The ability to listen attentively has been called sensitivity and it comes to some naturally, but those of us who aren't so lucky can develop it until it becomes a habit, through practice (Walker 2007).

Part 2: Criticizing

Criticism can be compared to rain, it should be gentle enough to nourish one's growth without destroying one's roots (Walker 2007). There are two types of criticism: positive and negative; the difference is the intent of the speaker and the way the criticism is presented. Positive criticism helps people grow and improve themselves while negative criticism creates anger and resentment. Even if the speaker has good intentions they can still accidentally give negative criticism by presenting the criticism in a negative way.

The following are some things that you should do when attempting to give positive criticism:

- Emphasize behavior rather than personality. People do not appreciate it when you attack their personality but they are more receptive when you cite specific behaviors that they could change.
- Refrain from using "You" messages. The use of "you" can create the feeling of a blame or an accusation. It is better to say how you feel rather than what they did to make you feel that way. For example you should say "I felt left out today when..." rather than "You ditched me today" It is difficult to argue with someone about how they feel, but you could argue all day with someone about what they did or didn't do.
- Focus on actual observations rather than judgments. When giving criticism, report on what actually happened because this is objective and is not dependent on your values and ideas.
- Do not criticize when angry or upset. When you are angry or upset that is all people hear. It is best to cool down and then come back and talk when you are not mad because you will get a much better response.
- Concentrate on sharing ideas rather than giving advice. It is less threatening to share your ideas with someone rather than give advice. When you give advice it implies that you believe your suggestion is the right way and it makes the other person uncomfortable if they disagree.

It is hard to know what you should do when someone criticizes you and many people get defensive without thinking. Getting defensive is not a good response when someone criticizes you because it can lead to anger and then you miss on the potentially helpful suggestions someone was about to give you.

The following are some suggestions on how to respond when people criticize you:

- Listen, do not get mad or defensive. You are not perfect and the speaker may have an insightful idea on how to improve yourself.

- Analyze the criticism to determine if it is valid. Is the speaker simply angry at you? If they are angry listen to what they have to say without agreeing or disagreeing.
- Decide what to do about the criticism if you decide it has merit. What can you do to change your behavior or prevent reoccurrences of the situation? If you change your behavior based on the criticism then let your critic know.
- Practice your new behavior pattern over and over until it becomes a habit (Walker 2007).

Part 3: Types of Active Listening

Active listening is the process of not only listening to someone, but also delivering deliberate responses to the speaker to let them know that you are paying attention and trying to truly understand what the speaker is saying. Often we only hear what someone is saying. We make no attempts to try to understand and process what they are trying to convey. If someone asks you a question, you need to be able to truly understand the question in order to properly answer them. If someone asks you for help, you need to be able to truly understand the problem to properly help them. This is a very important skill to learn not only in everyday life but in interpersonal relationships as well as in the academic and business worlds.

Minimal Encouragers is probably the easiest and most common method used during active listening. Minimal Encouragers are short supportive statements that show you are paying attention and understand what the speaker is saying. There are two types of minimal encouragers. The first type are statements such as "Mmmm-Hmmm," "Right," and "Ok." Another type is when you repeat a key word from the message of the speaker. For example if I were to say, "I love ice cream," you would respond with, "ice cream." Although simple, this is still an excellent way to let the speaker know that you are with them, are paying attention, and understanding what they are saying.

Reflection of content refers to the act of repeating the meaning of what the person is saying. For example, if I were to say, "I'm so excited that I got a new car! My old one broke it's axel on the highway making me super late for the job interview, but they totally understood and let me reschedule. So the only thing that could top the new car is the new job!" you would reply with, "Sounds like you are really excited about the new car, and how super exciting would it be for you to get the new job too!" Notice that is isn't parroting back what I said, but it was conveying that I am indeed listening and understanding well enough to remember what they told me. This method is very useful when done correctly, but is very easy to make sound condescending. It takes practice, but once mastered is invaluable.

Reflection of feeling is a lot like reflection of content; however instead of grabbing the main points of the statement you are going to reflect the statement of emotion. So to go back to our previous example of the car, when using reflection of feeling, you could likely respond with something like, "Wow, you really are excited about the new car and potential of the new job. That is great!" Notice how the emphasis is on the feeling of what was said, not just about the content of what was said.

Summarizing is the final key method in active listening. This is often used when listening to a very lengthy or involved statement. Its purpose is to give you the chance to condense and confirm that you not only heard, but also comprehend, and properly interpret what the speaker was trying to convey. For example, I tell you a very long list of things that you need to do in order to write a paper on your newest research project. Your summarization may sound something like this, "So you want me to make sure the intro is no longer than 1 page, I need to change the table on wing size, and make sure that I don't use any technical jargon because you want me to submit the final paper to Things and Stuff Journal. Did I miss anything?" Notice that at the end there is the need for verification. This is a key component of this method because this allows the speaker to either verify or explain better any part of the message.

These are just a few of the methods that you can use to get you started. The best thing to do is to experiment in your daily life and see how different people react to different types of feedback. Your mother may become really annoyed if you summarize everything she says, however your boss may hate when you just use minimal encouragers. Everybody is different. You will be good at some methods and other methods may not come naturally at all. Practice and learn what those around you respond to. Once you figure out how to listen to the people in your life, be they friends, family, or coworkers, you will discover a whole new level of understanding and cooperation.

Group Activity 2

This activity will take about 10 minutes

To practice the importance of listening, students will get into pairs to complete the following exercise. In the pairs, pick a listener and a speaker.

The speaker has 2 minutes to talk about the main part of their role in lab, with the listener unable to take notes, say anything but just sit there. At the end of 2 minutes, the listener has 1 minute to repeat back the key points of the speaker.

Then, take 3 minutes, the speaker will talk about their role as a student at UNLV, but this time the listener is allowed to take notes, ask questions etc. After the 3 minutes is up, the listener will have 2 minutes to repeat back the key points of the speaker.

Reverse roles. Repeat activity.

Retrieved from: <http://www.trainingzone.co.uk/topic/trainers-tips-active-listening-exercises/143120>

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